

Everran's Bane



SYLVIA KELSO

Everran's Bane

SYLVIA KELSO

What does the dragon know?

The kingdom of Everran is dying, razed by a dragon that came out of nowhere to burn its oil groves and devastate its vineyards and kill its folk. Everran was safe, prosperous, and contented, with peaceful lords, a strong king, and beautiful queen. What has it ever done to earn a curse?

But legend says, a dragon's coming always has a cause. If no enemy has bespelled the country, is there something wrong in Everran itself? Despite its prosperity and its peace and its royal couple who have not yet had a child?

Soldiers cannot stop the dragon. Not the mightiest champions in the Confederacy can defeat it. There is no help in Everran's neighbours, and none in legend or history. Nor in the riddle the dragon itself sets Harran the Harper when it tells him, jeeringly, that the weapon that could slay it has not been forged. But in the end, the riddle is the only hope Harran and his King Beryx have left.

Why has the dragon come?

What does the dragon know?

Answering its riddle will explain the ruin of a kingdom—and turn its ruler into something less than human but very much more than a man.



Everran's BANE



Everran's
BANE



Sylvia Kelso

Five Star • Waterville, Maine

Copyright © 2005 by Sylvia Kelso

All rights reserved.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination, or, if real, used fictitiously.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the express written permission of the publisher, except where permitted by law.

First Edition, Second Printing

Published in 2005 in conjunction with
Tekno Books and Ed Gorman.

Set in 11 pt. Plantin.

Printed in the United States on permanent paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kelso, Sylvia.

Everran's bane / by Sylvia Kelso.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-59414-353-6 (hc : alk. paper)

1st ed. I. Title.

PS3611.E475E94 2005

813'.6 22

2005004991

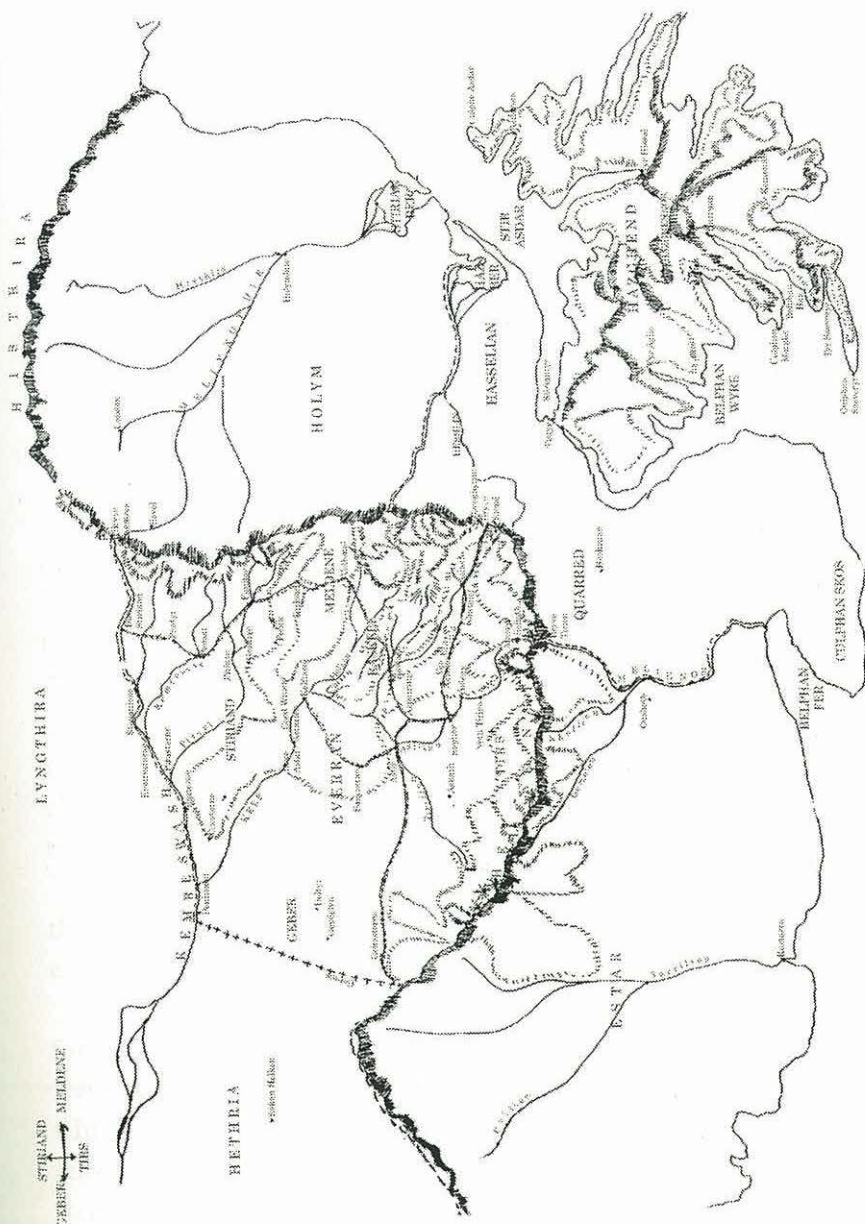
For
The Four Wise Women
eluki bes shahar
Lois McMaster Bujold
Pat Anthony
And now
Lillian Stewart Carl

sine qua non

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Gordon Aalborg especially for his speedy and patient editing and for playing Virgil through the first publishing *bolgia*, and to John Helfers for his equally patient help and speedy responses throughout.

And to the family members who read this book in progress and wanted more.



I

Where the dragon came from, nobody knows. It may have flown down from the torrid north, up from the icy south, east across the endless red deserts of Hethria, or west over the bulging blue eyeball of Nerrys'yr, the Peaceful Ocean. Whatever its origins, most people were sorry that it fell upon Everran, which was not only a small kingdom but prosperous, and not only a prosperous land but a contented one. They may have felt such a place should be dragon-proof as well as extraordinary.

As dragons go it was quite ordinary. That is, it was longer than an ocean-going ship, black, mail-clad, claw-toed, fire-breathing, winged, and ravenous. Or silver, fire-breathing, crested with stings, bearing a scorpion's tail, and ravenous. Or molten gold, crocodile-legged, fire-breathing, winged, clawed, possessing eyes that spellbound its prey before the teeth dismembered him. And ravenous. Always ravenous.

These descriptions come from eyewitnesses, or, at least, those who left at speed from a safe distance. No one close enough for accuracy survived.

Which brings me into this song: my name is Harran, and for three years before the dragon came I was hearthbard to the Everran kings. Being hearthbard, I am naturally a harper, which as naturally means, lore-keeper: the guardian of past and present, to whom truth is a sacred trust. I shall have cause to remember that, before this song ends. But I pledged myself to make it, and the holder of that pledge shall have truth entire and unbroken, however discreditable it proves to me.

About the Author

SYLVIA KELSO lives in North Queensland, Australia, and has been writing or telling stories for as long as she remembers. *Everran's Bane* is her first published fantasy novel, but she has published poetry in Australian literary magazines, and has a Creative Writing MA for an alternate history/SF novel set in alternate North Queensland. She lives in a house with a lot of trees in the garden, but no cats or dogs. She makes up for this by playing an Irish whistle. In public she plays Celtic music with a group of friends in a group called Kilbeggan, or with the local bush band, Wattle'n'Gum.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SYLVIA KELSO lives in North Queensland, Australia, and has been writing or telling stories for as long as she remembers. *Everran's Bane* is her first published fantasy novel, but she has published poetry in Australian literary magazines, and has a creative writing MA for an alternate history/SF novel set in alternate North Queensland. She lives in a house with a lot of trees in the garden, but no cats or dogs. She makes up for this by playing an Irish whistle. In public she plays Celtic music with a group of friends in a group called Kilbeggan, or with the local bush band, Wattle'n'Gum.

Advance praise for Sylvia Kelso's *Everran's Bane*:

"Kelso presents a beguiling voice in Harran, the hearthbard hero of *Everran's Bane*, and a deeply fascinating study of kingship in Beryx, Harran's charismatic liege-lord. The prose is dense and chewy, the worldbuilding complex and colorful, and plotting kept me turning pages till four in the morning.

This layered tale is at once a fantasy adventure and a commentary on such, not without sly humor here and there, as well as heartbreak and heroism. Highly recommended."

—Lois McMaster Bujold,
author of *The Curse of Chalion* and *Paladin of Souls*

"The exciting debut of a major new voice in fantasy.
Read Sylvia Kelso: she's great!"

—Rosemary Edghill,
author of *Paying the Piper at the Gates of Dawn* and *Other Stories*



ISBN 1-59414-353-6

EAN



9 781594 143533

5 2 5 9 5



Jacket design by
Christopher Wait

Jacket illustration by
Alan M. Clark